An Incomplete History of Will Graham's Teeth, as Told by Hannibal Lecter

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An Incomplete History of Will Graham's Teeth, as Told by Hannibal Lecter

by ifonlyiwaswittier

Summary

> "It takes a significant amount of force to detach a human tooth from an adult's skull. Hannibal has never been much interested in dentistry, but he's made a practice of sorts over the years. Pesky little things, teeth and their histories. He envies the little white fillings— tucked, as they are, so deep into Will's bones that they nearly touch the nerve — even as he derides them for their impermanence. What folly, to let something as benign as bacterial decay detach them from Will Graham."

In which Will curates an exquisite collection of teeth with the support of his loving husband.

(or, after one of their murder victims manages to (barely) injure Hannibal, Will removes all of his teeth. Hannibal is very, very into it.)

Notes

i so desperately wanted to ask my dentist some questions for this fic, but thankfully i was too numb to even form words (which is all to say, im entitled to my medical inaccuracies).

See the end of the work for more notes

The pliers are steady in Will's grip, forearm resting on his thighs, the implement dangling between his splayed legs. He is calm and assured in his actions.

Hannibal cannot say the same of himself; his fingers tremble where his hands hang at his sides. The pain is not overwhelming— Will has done an admirable job patching him up and the wound was ultimately shallow, albeit lengthy enough to appear bloodier than it warranted — so perhaps, then, it is the way Will looks up at him that sends him trembling. Will watches Hannibal's hands shake with the gaze of a wrathful god: the kind of righteous hunger that can only be borne of possession, of love. It is the same gaze he had turned on Hannibal last night, when he'd held Hannibal by the throat and told him, in no uncertain terms, that he would take what Will saw fit to give him, for however long Will saw fit to let him live, whether he liked it or not.

(And Hannibal had, of course, liked it.)

(Hannibal had liked it because, ultimately, there is nothing that could spring forth from Will's hands that Hannibal wouldn't covet— this being the very sin that had damned them both from the start, from before the start, from before time immemorial. But he had known that was not the role he was meant to play for Will's private theatre of tragedies yesterday evening, and so he'd tucked away his joy— o, behold, the ecstasy of saints— to revel in another night).

Will squats on his haunches to look up at Hannibal-- his concentration on the corpse in front of him broken by Hannibal's interruption. "You should be in bed," he tells Hannibal.

A drop of blood, thick and pearlescent, drips off the tip of the pliers.

"As should you," Hannibal replies, taking a tentative step towards Will, then another when his approach is met without rebuke.

Will narrows his eyes. "And why's that?"

"Because that's where I am," Hannibal replies.

At that, Will cracks. Sighs, shoulders slumping, the pliers dangling loosely in his grip.

"And is that your medical opinion, Doctor Lecter? If I recall, I wasn't the one who got stabbed."

"Not tonight at least."

Will smirks. "Not tonight."

The man's mouth lolls open between them, a gaping, bloody maw; inertia drags the head towards Hannibal now that Will's hands are otherwise occupied, no longer holding it in place to facilitate his endeavor. The top jaw was already half-empty by the time Hannibal woke, the teeth in a tidy line out of the way but still within reach, their pulpy roots still dangling from

the bulbous swells of bone. The next tooth— the tenth one, by Hannibal's count— is still pinched between the plier's needles.

"How may I help?" Hannibal asks, pulling up the knees of his pants to crouch next to Will. The bandage taped across his side tugs at the skin in protest.

Will turns the pliers back and forth in his grip, the overhead light (a truly dreadful choice of decor-- the sooner they can get out of here and back home, the better) gleaming off of the still spit-slick tooth and the bloody nerve endings.

"I think this is something I need to do by myself," Will replies, eyes distant and distracted.

"Perhaps I can keep you company then."

Will blinks, and comes back from wherever he had just been visiting-- a room of his mind palace that Hannibal will have to ask him to tour later, once they are done here. He smiles.

"Make yourself comfortable," he replies, and so Hannibal does.

Tonight Will digs his fingers into the wound across Hannibal's middle under the guise of treating it. Like crinkling pink cellophane of candy, he unwraps Hannibal to reach the pulsating sweetness of his opened flesh. He thumbs at the slick insides until it parts, just as Hannibal's lips do too, and then Will's, all of them open— what luscious words crowd in the backs of their mouths, the open slash like a third person with them, as if it too could speak. His gut is not the only thing that spills open, blood burbling as Will presses his fingers in, the barely formed scab easily giving way for Will's probing touch. It was too shallow for stitches before, but Will is going to change that. He presses Hannibal's shoulder back to the bed, forcing him to lay flat so he can't crane his neck to watch Will's ministrations. Kneeling over Hannibal, one hand holding him down and the fingers of his other still brushing along the bloodied skin of his lower belly, Will looks down at him with such fierce possessiveness. *Please*, crowds up against the back of his teeth.

— oh how Will loves when he begs, loves to know that he is the only one who can satiate him, as if that has not always been the case, as if God himself had not crafted Hannibal's body for their shared enjoyment—

But instead, Hannibal reaches for him, clasps his hand on the side of Will's face, thumb in the soft hairs tucked behind his ear.

"Lie still," Will tells him, and Hannibal lowers his hand back to the bed, but despite his best efforts Hannibal's middle quivers even as he holds his breath.

Mine, Will says by opening the seam further, turning the work of another's hands into his own. *Mine*, he says by lapping up the blood along Hannibal's belt line, Hannibal's hand palming the top of his head like a benediction.

Quite unfortunate, really, the whole ordeal, even if it has led to this moment, led to the many moments that will follow it in the years to come as the jar Will has tucked into his side of the

sock drawer fills with teeth and then spills over into another, even as Hannibal protests that they ought to display them on the mantle. The man tonight had a surprising tolerance for the sedatives and got one good slash in with the scalpel Hannibal had left on the work table, plus a kick to the knee that sent him careening backward, clipping the back of his head against the unforgiving granite of the countertop, rendering him insensate for a time. He's not sure how Will descended upon the man afterward, only that he had, swiftly and with enough force that most of the meat was unusable. Will had apologized— so demure among the carnage of such an awe-inspiring display that Hannibal considered undoing his trousers and taking him in his mouth right there— after Hannibal had awoken on the man's couch and returned to find Will in the kitchen removing the teeth. Oh, how Will has shaped the currents so the tide washed them onto the shores of this brutal pleasure. He would sustain a thousand cuts if it meant Will would look at him like this forever. Hannibal has never felt so protected, so loved, as he does when he's between Will's teeth.

There is an alcohol swab now— Will's monster will be a well-tended one— and Hannibal finally opens himself to the moan that has been filling his mouth with a pressure fit to burst. He clutches at Will's hair, and desperately scrabbles until his other hand finds Will's free one, grasping and being grasped in return. The pain is not overly much, but in concert with the rawness of his newly reopened flesh, with the sensation of Will's chest pressed between his legs— lying on top of him to taste the split skin— his chest is heaving.

Mine, Will says, as he sinks the needle into Hannibal and pulls him closed again.

He wishes this new wound, thin and curved like a smile, would grow teeth and open even further, bite off Will's hand for driving Hannibal to desperation. He wishes this new wound would grow teeth and open so he could take all of Will inside him. It is the holiest of sacraments to consume the body of God, after all.

He arches into Will's touch, pressing into Will pulling him apart. "Here," he breathes, and moans at the bite of Will's teeth along the tender edge of the wound.

The second time, Will doesn’t wait until the man is dead before getting out his pliers. Hannibal finds this unbearably endearing.

Will’s teeth must have been yellowed in his youth. Hannibal knows this because now they are perfectly white, fastidiously so. There is a beauty in it— in the natural decay of the body with time— that Will’s surroundings have so cruelly denied him. Teeth should ever so slightly yellow with age even under the best of care, the same way even the finest of manuscripts should yellow as time enshrines them. (No man is immune from the ravages of time and yet so few invest the effort to create a legacy as Hannibal has.) Will's teeth glisten with an unnaturally bright patina, and yet Hannibal knows he is not a vain man, not in the usual sense. Americans can behave so oddly about dental hygiene— assigning morals to the completely harmless crookedness of an incisor or inconsequential the gap left by a tooth removed— and Will was marked from the beginning. The poverty of Will's youth was a sickeningly sweet thing, a glut of candied neglect that rotted the teeth from his skull.

('Say cheese!', so the saying goes. 'Peel those lips back and show us those pearly whites'.)

Little brown pockets of decay, scooped out and filled by the dues he paid to the New Orleans police union. Thin plastic, scraped along the hollow where his nerve roots into the jaw bone — as the doctor finished taking away these rotted parts of him, filling it until the plastic hits home and the sharp nerve pain sang down to his fingertips, had Will thought of the infection that coursed through the rest of him, of the parts of himself that would never be clean? Will's mouth is a topography of pain and the stopgap measures taken to abate it. Nearly every tooth patched together by a bridge or a filling or a crown, years and years of dental care that Will undertook as an adult, a flimsy effort to hold together the kind of person he thought he was supposed to be. It is a landscape he has explored countless times.

(Open wide, and his fingers disappear into the soft depths.

Open wide, and his tongue laps along the seam, just barely starting to split, where a cavity was long ago patched over.

Open wide, and Hannibal settles himself between Will's legs).

He envies the little white fillings— tucked, as they are, so deep into Will’s bones that they nearly touch the nerve— even as he derides them for their impermanence. What folly, to let something as benign as bacterial decay detach them from Will Graham. What foolish flimsiness.

He does not begrudge Will his need for dentistry. He is a doctor after all, as much as the American Board of Medicine would now deny it, if perhaps in a different manner than before; he understands how rot and decay spread. In his idle moments— which are more plentiful now that they've settled into a more long-term home in Iceland— he does entertain the fantasy, however, that he could have been the one to perform the procedures. The images — leave him shaking, quaking with the awe that he is worthy of plying bones from Will, of filling him. It is a pleasure too great for a mere mortal. No one else deserves to touch Will there— along the ridges of his hard palette, along the swells of his gums. Surely the connection is too tenuous by now if Will's dentists were to go missing. Especially if he starts with the earliest one and picks them off over time, the way one uses a toothpick to catch an errant piece of salad greens caught between molars. He could take their teeth, the way Will did during their last slaughtering, a stroke of brilliance so inspiring that Hannibal had insisted they display the meat they weren't taking with them, improvising together a stunning if simple vision, Hannibal conjuring imagery largely pulled (forgive the pun) from Caravaggio's The Tooth Puller while Will worked from whatever place he'd slipped off too when he'd begun the extraction in the first place, that place in his mind where he’d still been mired when Hannibal had woken from his (thankfully very brief, as much as had Will fussed) period of unconsciousness thanks to the particularly rowdy man they had been butchering that night.

But no, he would never plagiarize Will's artistic style. Perhaps, instead, he would tend to the dentists like a farmer to his crops. Deny them nothing except dental hygiene. They would want for nothing except the care they gave Will until their enamel is pockmarked by rot. A sugary diet too, perhaps, though he would be concerned about the effect on the meat. It

wouldn't do to serve Will something subpar when he feasted on their cattle with the teeth the cows had given him.

He has fantasized about doing the same to Will. He would wait until Will's teeth were withered and brittle, loosely hanging on by the throbbing, infected nerves— or, even later, dangling by the dead threads of flesh. He would pluck them from Will's mouth and then— well, there are too many options, each so exciting that Hannibal can barely decide. Would the tooth scrape the inside of his esophagus if he swallowed it whole? What texture would it have if he ground it to a fine, powdery dust? Would it taste of death? Of Will? And then there is, of course, the image of Will himself, body racked with fever, eyes fluttering, empty gums bloody and swollen when he smiles at Hannibal —

"You have no business looking so pleased right now," Will says from the doorway, Hannibal's robe draped loosely over his shoulders but left untied. A treat for Hannibal, then.

"Don't I?" Hannibal asks, meeting Will's eyes in the mirror with a smile. He would have every part of Will if he could, but not yet. Not yet. For now, he much prefers Will just like this, slinking over to Hannibal and smiling at him with a mouth full of gleaming white teeth, the feeling of his hands joining Hannibal's on top of the bandages around Hannibal's middle belying the falsehood of his perfect teeth. Hannibal has been ostensibly changing the bandages from that pesky knife wound he'd been dealt a few nights ago, but his hands have wandered, mostly stroking along the curve of the just-healed wound and imagining the look on Will's face when he'd pulled the next tooth.

"We match," Will says, rubbing his thumb over the pink flesh.

"Not quite," Hannibal exhales.

"Maybe I should fix that then. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Hannibal?"

It's a rhetorical question but Hannibal tips his head back, leaning into Will's arms where he's pressed up behind him, twists his neck until he can nip at the corner of Will's jaw. That's answer enough.

"Not today though," Will replies, something hovering just at the edge of his voice, a loose thread, the promise of an unraveling. "I have other plans for today."

(He wants to live as Will's tongue, muscle and need swathed in wet heat, saliva like a benediction anointing the clefts of his palate, the creases where skin parts. The only disappointment: that he would be a muscle stopped at the edge of Will's throat, unable to press into that tight clench of esophagus. He would shiver with Will's every breath.)

(Not that different from now, really.)

(Pressed up against the back of Will's teeth— traversing the topography of them, the artificial smooth of a crown, the gap in the back of his mouth where a molar was removed in his teenage years— he would sleep, peaceful, and dream of the same things Will's teeth do: of taking a bite from Hannibal. Of eating the world.)

It takes a significant amount of force to detach a human tooth from an adult's skull. Hannibal has never been much interested in dentistry, but he's made a practice of sorts over the years. Pesky little things, teeth and their histories. Best to remove them, when possible. It makes much more hassle for law enforcement. The displays are an art form of their own, but Hannibal is no stranger to practicality. To sustain his diet, he's often engaged in a modern man's hunting and carefully discarded whatever was unusable. However, there are other ways to ensure law enforcement can't match a body to a missing person report (the easiest of them being to ensure the police never find the body at all) and the task is time-consuming, often with no other option besides working in a location not ideal for such an activity.

And yet Will has quickly built a habit of pulling teeth, so Hannibal builds in the time into their hunts. Planning is usually a mutual activity— the sweet shared pleasure of anticipating shared pleasure— but lately, there are times when Will abstains from planning. That is how Hannibal knows that Will is once again overcome with whatever needs the teeth satiate.

"I think we need a night out," Will says to him one morning as he lazily stirs his coffee. He has been sleeping poorly since they left Iceland a couple weeks ago, forced to abandon the home they'd built there over the course two years because of a particularly tenacious True Crime podcaster. Vietnam suits them-- or at least Hannibal thinks it will, once Will is able to abandon the tense set of his shoulders, the fear that had plagued him almost constantly in their early years together and has returned like an unwanted guest the few times they've been forced to move house.

"I'll pack our bags then," Hannibal replies and folds the newspaper. He sets his glasses on top and reminds himself of the details of a little idea he's been sitting on since their arrival, a particularly nasty Customs Officer who refused them Will's tackle box despite Hannibal's protestations that it was well within the bounds of the law. He stands and turns to leave when Will catches his wrist.

"And Hannibal?" he asks.

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't forget the pliers."

Hannibal bends down and presses a sweet, lingering kiss to Will's forehead. "Of course not, my love."

(*"Beware: wild beasts claim sharp teeth," reads an inaccurate, if serendipitous, English translation of a sign at a forest park in Chile.*

"I've heard plying the creatures with breakfast can help," Hannibal says as they both stand in front of the sign, amused at the sign and at their shared mirth.

"Breakfast works best when the creature is starved," Will replies.

"But even a wild thing can be taught to feast past satiation, can it not?"

“Feed it enough breakfasts, consistently and over a long enough period of time, and you can teach even the wildest of creatures to indulge in anything,” Will replies, and clutches the cuff of Hannibal’s jacket with his pinkie finger.)

(*“Breakfast,” Will says with a smirk the next morning. His teeth are bloody when he raises his head to look up at Hannibal.*

Hannibal cranes his neck to see where the meat of his shoulder oozes blood, thick with delight, the outline of Will’s mouth throbbing like a crown of thorns, like a wedding ring. Will has bitten him on the thick slope of his shoulder where it tapers into his bicep. The blood rolls down his arm and smears across Will when Hannibal flips them so he is looming over Will.

“I hope you’ve made enough for two, my darling,” he breathes against the flesh below Will’s ribs. Oh, how many have forgotten Jesus’s open side, the vestibule of the banquet of the Lamb, a wound that could only ever hope to be as holy as the ones he’s wrought on Will. He bites until the flesh parts.

“Tell me,” he pants— though the exertion has been minimal, he can’t seem to catch his breath, or still the pounding of his heart, “have you learned to feast?”

Will snarls up at him, struggles against Hannibal’s hold until Hannibal grips him hard enough to bruise. It’s reassurance as much as it’s a test— to find how deep his teeth can sink into Hannibal, to find how tightly Hannibal clenches him in his jaw— and eventually, he stills under Hannibal’s cooing. Will fights Hannibal’s hold until he relaxes under the fingers that stroke his face, his hair, until he is finally satisfied that he has been violated enough— that he has struggled enough— to allow himself to accept tenderness.

“My monster, my beauty,” Hannibal breathes into his skin. “I want nothing more than to satiate you.”

“Then do it,” Will hisses. And Hannibal does.)

(*A different morning with a culling of a different kind: teeth cracked wide open, teeth that have felt so many words hissed between them, parting for him, swallowing what Hannibal offers him and taking it deep inside him, parting as Will throws his head back and the sound that wrenches its way out from the valley of his mouth—*)

The next time it's the dry cleaner who won't accept Hannibal's ticket— and for their new duvet, nonetheless. He has a cavity in his left canine filled with silver, and Will turns it back and forth as the metal glimmers, watching with fascination the way it catches glints of light.

The flippant motorcycle repairman becomes a lovely rendang that's even lovelier when he licks the taste of it— opened mouth kisses over a jar of baking soda solution and well-maintained teeth (a fine addition to Will’s collection) — from Will’s lips.

The fifth time it's the technician who's meant to connect their home internet in their new house in Malaysia. Hannibal understandings there's little to be done about the delay— they're quite deep in the verdant forests, after all— but for the technician to not only insist that there's nothing to be done on this first visit, but to insist that it's Hannibal's mistake the company gave him the wrong information and, further, insist that he must wait yet another week for another technician, implying that Hannibal is an imbecile incapable to plugging a router into a wall himself—

How pleasing when Will lines the teeth on a dishtowel to dry. The full set in two neat rows is a much lovelier use than the sight of them crowding the technician's mouth, crooked and flashing yellow around his impotent words.

The company sends another technician the next day, apologizing profusely that their first technician never showed. It's no trouble at all, Hannibal demurs, and what a terrible affair, for the technician to have gone missing. No one has heard from him in two days now but his motorbike was found at a train station and he does have a history of racking up debts, after all.

"What a sordid tale," Will bemoans when Hannibal relays this information to him. He is curled up against Hannibal's chest, an arm slung around him, loose and satiated by his most recent harvest. Hannibal refreshes *Tattlecrime* — nothing new— and clicks his tablet off. Freddie is finally catching on to the string of toothless murder victims but lost the trail back in Iceland. Perhaps the internet technician will be sufficient to help her get the scent back— how exhilarated she must be to bring her reporting to an international stage. Hannibal is quite excited that Will is so eager to provide her content, even if that is a side effect rather than the main goal.

He wraps his own arms around Will and hauls him up— *hey!* Will grumbles in protest, *I was comfy* — so he's lying on top of him. A few kisses— then a few more— and all is forgiven, Will made happy to rest on top of Hannibal. They sleep like that, pressed into each other as if gravity could make them one (and oh, how Hannibal would love nothing more, both melted down by the Earth’s pressure and poured into the same mold) and he dreams of the teeth loose on the counter and of the feral cats that leave dead birds on the back porch as offerings.

("I think our guest requires tending to," Hannibal says.

The screaming from the other room has died down— ghastly, really, but Will likes them vocal. It often tapers off into silence once all the teeth are out. The pain threshold of the human body is much higher than most people assume— or ever get the pleasure of experiencing for that matter, let alone at the hands of their beloved. But the real misconception is how long people will fight against that threshold until they finally relent and let themselves be pushed through the wall. "I will never stop screaming," they all think. “I will never stop fighting back.” No one has ever said it to him in as many words, but he can see it in nearly every animal's eyes when Will begins his work.

They all do— stop screaming that is. Everyone gets tired eventually.

"But you're still dirty," Will teases. "Don't you need to clean up? Wouldn't do to operate in unsanitary conditions."

"Very astute, my love," he says, and lets Will usher him into the bathtub, undress him like a deflowering, and bathe every inch of his body until it's reddened and sensitive with his ministrations.)

His toothbrush sits next to Hannibal's in the hand-carved stone holder they sourced from a local craftsman. Both are new and freshly unpackaged, bristles only showing the slightest signs of wear. *Welcome to Singapore* , read a gleaming red and white sign above the airport gift shop where Hannibal bought them, their last ones somehow mysteriously lost between Kuala Lumpur and here. Hannibal resents their electric whirring, the grooves and curves of their unblemished white handles. He would clean Will's teeth with his tongue if he could, lap up everything that would do him harm. He wants Will to gnaw on his hair, soft bristles of their own, instead of brushing himself with something plasticine and artificial.

Nowhere has stuck lately— or rather they haven't stuck anywhere, not since Iceland at least. Hannibal was perfectly happy to settle in Vietnam, then again in Kuala Lumpur, but Will has been unmoored, and Hannibal is nothing if not patient. Together they've been rattling around the globe like baby teeth in a glass jar, a relic from a life neither of them ever had. Milk teeth, something shed to make way for something new. Outgrown. They click and clack against each other, their mouths colliding then giving way to tongues then giving way to the biting — that's where Will keeps them after all, the teeth he collects from their livestock; they're inside their mouths just as much as they're inside the re-purposed jam jar in Will's bedside table.

"Perhaps I could add one of my own to your collection," Hannibal suggests one night, unloading the meat into the fridge while Will washes his new acquisitions in the sink. He has already used a scalpel to shave away the majority of the blood and pulp that clings to the bone even as the body relinquishes its hold. Next, he will leave them in a baking soda solution overnight. Rinsing them in the sink beforehand is largely unnecessary, but Hannibal suspects Will already knows this, even as he cups the teeth in his hands under the running water. Two front teeth this time— an unusual choice, as Will usually selects the molars when he doesn't choose to acquire the full set. Hannibal has tried to ask him about his selection criteria, an instance of Will's thought process being almost entirely opaque to him, but Will refuses to discuss it. He won't discuss anything about developing his collection with Hannibal, actually— not his process for selecting which teeth to take nor his reasoning behind the timing.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Will asks over his shoulder. Another minute, and he shuts off the water, shaking off his dripping hands before drying them on the grey and red checkered dishtowel draped over the dishwasher handle. The towel was a gift from Will, left for Hannibal to find on the kitchen counter, wrapped in butcher's paper and tied with twine like it was one of their fine cuts. Will's gifts— the constant, small material pleasures that he gives to Hannibal— are like the teeth, another thing Hannibal is not allowed to mention, so instead Hannibal always makes sure to launder and replace the towel with haste.

“I would like it immensely,” Hannibal says, closing the refrigerator door and turning to mirror Will, leaning back against the kitchen island across from him.

“And the,” Will pauses, “implication doesn’t offend you? That your teeth are no better than those of bovine?”

“Abraham slaughtered sheep on the mountainside as a pale substitute for the true display of his devotion; God only blessed the swing of his cleaver when he brought it down on the one he loved.”

Will raises an eyebrow at him, the corner of his lip curling in a smirk, a flash of incisors as he opens his mouth to speak.

“You think you’re so clever,” Will says, stalking toward Hannibal and planting his hands on his hips.

Hannibal huffs, grabbing Will’s hips as well— a futile effort to keep him at a distance so he can get the answers he so covets.

“Aren’t I?”

Will hums, playing at consideration and Hannibal relents, letting Will advance until they’re pressed together shoulder to knees— one small battle lost in the course of his campaign for knowledge.

“Not as much as you think. Better luck next time.” And he smiles against Hannibal’s lips.

What delightful ways Will finds to distract him. What clever machinations he enacts— with knives, with lips, with hands that bend him over the countertop and spread him open, *mise en place*. What a devious, splendid man. His. Undeniably *his*. Will has the bite marks on his hips to prove it, after all.

Teeth on his skin.

Teeth on the most sensitive parts of him, knowing that with just a little more pressure Will could take a bite and carry Hannibal’s oh so erogenous places with him everywhere, nestled in the space between his gums and his lips, settled deep in his belly where his body has digested Hannibal’s love and turned it into indulgence incarnate, into a beast that craves and — and wipes his mouth and asks Hannibal with a smile— *more, more, more*.

Teeth on the most sensitive parts of him. Will could tear him apart. Hannibal would welcome it.

Teeth on the most sensitive parts of him and yet he is not split open but cradled, cradled as his own teeth chatter— chatter with fever and chatter against the rattling force of confessions and chatter against the chill of the one, single night they tried to spend apart until Will

returned before daybreak, the joyful resignation of having truly exhausted every possibility, excuses about bad water conditions and bad weather and bad luck crowding together in his mouth, kissed away before they could even make it past his teeth.

(And then there are the teeth he refuses to acknowledge. The teeth he found in the refuse pile. The teeth that confirmed what he'd already known from the straining fullness of his stuffed belly.

He never did find the rest of Mischa's bones. He would've carved them into knives if he had. He supposes that, by a fashion, he did anyway.)

Teeth without a mouth, a mouth without teeth. Separate the two and what do you have? Something that rends him with words, sharper than any canines. He remembers. He remembers that afternoon and he feels the sensation of snow under his knees, of the rough canvas of the hospital's slippers, of the hard edge of the mouth guard buckled too tightly, his lips flattened against the sharp edges of his own teeth. Oh, how he remembers, more often now that they are moving again. He nearly insists they leave Kuala Lumpur because the curtains are too thin and he cannot sleep. They never did turn off the lights out in the hospital.

But as his eyes twitch behind his eyelids— reddened by the light seeping around the edges of the curtains, seeping through— he reminds himself of the sounds of Will coming home. The sound of his key in the lock, his little groan as he lowers himself down to untie his shoes, the jar of teeth rattling as he comes to Hannibal, finds him in the kitchen or the study or their bedroom, wherever he may be, and wraps his arms around him. Ever since they'd left Iceland, Will has kept his growing collection in a small jar he'd pilfered from the recycling bin and washed. Hannibal has considered getting him a nicer alternative— a hand-carved box, something velvet lined and befitting the treasures inside— but Will would object so he restrains himself.

Now, Hannibal is glad for it; he thinks of the sounds of bone on glass, and sinks into the steady breathing of Will beside him, finally succumbing to sleep.

There's always another set of teeth lurking behind the first, waiting until their predecessors' resistance is finally ground down by the relentless *chewing, chewing, chewing* needed to satiate hunger. They all fall eventually, and those newer sharper things— oh, how sweetly they break his flesh. Will wants to grind Hannibal beneath his teeth until he's soft and malleable. Hannibal wants to bite down on Will and shake him like a rabid animal until he finally goes limp.

Sometimes, they get what they want. Sometimes teeth grow in places they don't expect teeth to grow. Tonight, they grow from Will's fingertips where he presses Hannibal to the soft, wet earth. Teeth sprout from the forest floor like the delicate white flowers of spring, buds torn open to blossom just as Will tears Hannibal open now. They flourish in the dark and damp of April's rainy season, white-capped and gorgeous in their rot, like the mushrooms crowding the base of the tree just beyond Hannibal's reach. He should gather some before they return

home. Chanterelles, most likely. A lovely accompaniment to the banker Will harvested molars from two nights ago.

Is this forest— the one behind their newest house in Norway— the kind of place the beasts of Will's mind inhabit? Dank and wet and throbbing with teeming life? Hannibal can nearly see it now— that wild, feathered thing Will described to him in those early days of relearning each other. He can see it in the heaving of Will's own chest above him, in the limp hair hanging in front of Will's eyes, damp and dark with sweat. He can see it in the thickly corded muscles of Will's thighs as they brace either side of his chest. This game has many endings because, as much as it *is* a game, it is also not a game at all— it's a story. Grief is just a story left unfinished— trauma, the mind's attempts to write its ending— and Hannibal is always happy to help Will pen a satisfying conclusion when he needs one. It's more artistry than sport, all the little ways they've come to hunt each other, and tonight it's led them here: to a pursuit that has ended deep in the forest, Hannibal on his back as Will holds him down.

The anticipation of the story's final page pulsates. Will Hannibal flip them, pin Will down and take him right there on the forest floor? Or will he flay himself open under Will’s tender ministrations? Or is the fight not yet gone from Will, who will dig his fingers into Hannibal's throat? Or will he give them one of Hannibal's favorite endings, the one where Will, still straddling Hannibal's chest, unzips his pants and--

"I win," Will sneers. He digs his knees more firmly into Hannibal's sides.

So it's going to be that kind of night then. Hannibal huffs a laugh and spits the blood from his mouth.

"Have you?" Hannibal replies, loose and open-mouthed with pleasure. “I could knock the teeth from your skull.”

"You could," Will smirks.

But you won't , goes unspoken, *not unless I asked you to* .

There is a bruise already growing on Will's cheekbone and Hannibal raises his hand, presses his fingers into what his fist had wrought during their chase. How desperately he wants to be the force that removes those pretty white teeth from his mouth. He's so much more worthy of that violence than the petty ravages of time and circumstance.

"What would you replace them with," Will gasps, leaning into the pressure Hannibal digs into the blossoming bruise, "if you did?"

Hannibal smooths his thumb over his handiwork. "Perhaps I'll use some from your specimens. It's quite a fine collection you've created."

"Maybe I have other plans for those.”

"Perhaps I won't replace them at all, then," Hannibal replies and brings both his hands down to hold Will’s waist, fingers splayed over the junction between his jeans and the bare skin of his hip bones.

"And have me gumming at your food for the rest of my days?" Will teases, leaning forward to nip at the skin of Hannibal's neck until it is reddened and tender. Hannibal arches back, craning his neck into the edges of his teeth until Will finally, finally bites down. He thinks of kittens being carried by the scruff of their neck between teeth— cradled and protected by what could rip them apart— until his skin bursts under Will's teeth and he thinks of nothing at all. He hears himself cry out in ecstasy over the sound of rushing blood, and Will licks at the bite mark lewdly.

"You wouldn't abide by a soft food diet," Will breathes into Hannibal's bloodied neck. His hands run up and down Hannibal's shoulders, his collar bones, and Hannibal clutches his hips hard enough to leave behind crescent-moon scars. "What would you do when you feed yourself to me someday? Put your liver in a blender?"

"You're appalling," Hannibal laughs— so breathlessly, so helplessly smitten.

So amused with himself , Hannibal thinks. What a wicked, tempestuous creature. Hannibal should eat him whole for driving him to such a frenzy with nothing more than hands trailing down his chest, mouth close behind, for making him desperate like a worm wriggling in the dirt as his hips settle further back to press down onto Hannibal's—

And oh, Lord, so blessed are the worms who feast on saints—

"Plus," Will breathes against Hannibal's chest. They are both panting now. "I think you like it too much when I bite you."

He looks down at the top of Will's head, hair disheveled from the chase, by Hannibal's grip, and feels such sharp hopelessness at the force of his love for this man— so helpless against the strength of his adoration— that he wants to rip him limb from limb.

"Mine then," Hannibal gasps, the tip of Will's incisor brushing against his nipple through his shirt. He grasps Will's shoulders until he can haul him up so they're face to face, desperate to quell the needy, fragile creature that lives inside him, that part of him that feels bereft every moment he isn't looking into Will's eyes. "And I'll take yours— bury them, Cerebus sharp, in the bone of my jaw."

A flash then, of what he's seen in Will that first night he'd found him extracting teeth. But then that fierceness shifts its focus to the pursuit of pleasure— "Sounds like a fair trade," he smiles against Hannibal's cheek— and Hannibal caresses his jaw, turns Will's face to meet his own, and kisses the taste of his own blood from Will's lips.

Several months ago, there was the home insurance broker who tried to scam Hannibal while he was settling their affairs before leaving Malaysia, and who had teeth so rotted they crumbled under the pliers. Will discarded them in disgust.

Soon after that, in Singapore, there was the man so engrossed in his phone that he bumped into Hannibal on the sidewalk, spilled soup all down his front— the turmeric Hannibal could smell in it stained his suit and shirt, ruined the whole outfit— and insisted it was Hannibal's fault. Hannibal never did find out what kind of businessman he was— Will took care of

nearly all the planning for that one— but he does know the businessman's teeth were severely yellowed from years of smoking. Otherwise, though, the teeth were healthy enough for Will to polish down to glimmering white again, hunched over at the kitchen table while Hannibal made a curried soup of his own nearby. He suffused the house with the smell of turmeric and saffron— lavish and rich, until the air was teeming with an abundance of it— eager to fill his lover again and again and again.

(Fingers pressed against the solid fortress of Will's teeth, an impenetrable barrier penetrated so Hannibal can deliver him their absolution. The berries are sweet and ripe and plump, flush with juices that dribble in thick obscene trails down Will's chin and onto Hannibal's palms, placed one after another onto Will's tongue until he must taste as sweet as the berries themselves— Hannibal wants to know if that's the case, so he tests it with his own mouth, and discovers that Will is even sweeter.

Will opens his mouth and Hannibal understands what he wants, what he needs, and so Hannibal feeds it to him. Inside Will, the tips of his fingers brushing his tongue, but still Will does not close his mouth around the berry, doesn't swallow until Hannibal's fingers are brushing the back of his throat and only then does he consume the offering, only then does he close his lips around Hannibal's fingers, close his teeth around Hannibal's knuckles and bite. The teeth dig into the wrinkled flesh of his knuckle, pressing into the hollow of the joint. Will finds purchase right between the nubs of bone, the easiest place to dislocate it, if only he would break through the flesh, if only he would tear apart that cartilage—

Hannibal fists his other hand in Will's hair, grasping firmly at the roots until he feels the hairs snapping, the scalp straining.

Will stops and Hannibal finds himself with the unenviable urge to whine at the disappointment.

"You could stop me, you know," Will says. Hannibal's finger still hovers near his face, Hannibal finding himself curiously unable to move.

"I could," Hannibal replies, entirely breathless.

"But you wouldn't."

"I wouldn't," he agrees and Will licks the bloody ring dripping around his knuckle until Hannibal is mollified.)

"Would you like to do one?" Will asks him one evening, holding out the pliers to him. The bank teller is half delirious now, moaning and mumbling, incoherent where her tongue laps against the bloodied gums. Serves her right for her imprudence, Hannibal thinks. A much better use for her tongue than the ways she wished to use it on him.

It's a better angle, Will tells him, to kneel while the prey sits. Makes it easier to get the tooth out with one pull. And as Will stands, Hannibal goes to his knees and he finds himself thinking of prayer, of communion, of the Pentecost Sunday when he was confirmed.

(*— the traitor who delivered thy beloved Master into the hands of His enemies, I invoke thee as the patron of hopeless cases— of things despaired of. Pray for me who am so needy; make use, I implore you, of that special privilege accorded to you —*)

"Here," Will says, coming behind Hannibal and adjusting how the pliers are gripping the tooth. The bank teller is pushing uselessly at the pliers with her tongue, her last resort now that her jaw is broken. Will always dislocates the joint before they'd start— easier access that way. Certainly a tenacious one, this bank teller, but that was to be expected given her insistence with Hannibal.

"Now if you hold your wrist a bit more— yeah, just like that. You won't feel it at first," Will explains, "but unless you keep your hand at a natural angle, you'll start to feel the strain after a few."

"Like this?" Hannibal asks, adjusting his hand again.

"That's perfect," Will praises, bending over to drape himself over Hannibal's back. "You're a natural."

That sweet honeyed pleasure, thick as moans and slick as screams, the joy Will spoons into his mouth until Hannibal is choking on it and even then, begs for more, more, *more* —

Will loosely wraps his arms over Hannibal's shoulders and kisses the top of his head. The bank teller's mumbles pitch into whining keens; her slick, empty gums smear streaks of red up and down the plier's tips as she frantically shakes her head against Hannibal's intrusion.

"Now whenever you're ready," Will says, resting his chin on the crown of Hannibal's head.

Hannibal licks his lips and pulls.

(The tip of his tongue laps at the edges of Will's fingernails, the soft white crescents of their ends, sucking at the blood to reveal the pink nail beds and the flaking cuticles beneath.

"No, wait," he'd demanded, grabbing Will's wrist to stop him from turning on the tap. "Allow me."

Hannibal presses the full length of his tongue against the length of Will's finger, deep enough that the tip slides against the ball of Will's palm. Will's fingers are calloused, rough against the soft slide of muscle and heat where the back of Hannibal's tongue turns into the hot clench of his throat. He wants to choke on Will, to have him be the last taste on his tongue. His mouth fills with saliva at the thought, washing away the taste of blood as he tends to each finger until they are fastidiously clean and he pulls the last— Will's pinkie— from his lips with a wet pop.

He wishes Will's fingertips would grow teeth instead of nails so they could gnaw at the insides of his cheek. He wants to feel what Will's fingers do, feel what his teeth feel and Will, so generous, must know this because he does the same, brings Hannibal's fingers to his lips and kisses each finger before taking the first into his mouth, just a hint of teeth.

Hannibal moans and Will takes the opportunity to plunge his own fingers back into Hannibal's mouth. He closes his lips around Will and suckles until they're both moaning around the generous flesh of the other.)

And then there is the young man on the ferry with his feet up on the seats, the one who calls Hannibal a very colorful Norwegian word when Hannibal politely asks if they may sit there, as there are no other seats left. The boy still has his wisdom teeth, the first ones Will has ever collected before— stubborn little things the jawbone is reluctant to relinquish— and that night Hannibal and Will toast a glass to celebrate the new acquisition.

The man from the opera house has a very well-executed crown. Hannibal would know after all, he and Will have become connoisseurs of this sort of thing lately. It's beautiful cosmetic work and most likely quite old, old enough to have aged and yellowed at the same pace as the rest of the teeth. So well-crafted, Will doesn't recognize the crown for what it is until he pulls it out and the filling underneath comes with it. Left behind is the dilapidated tooth structure itself and the hole— now refilling with blood— where the filling used to bridge the crown to the body.

"Get me a towel," Will demands, and Hannibal rushes to bring him one from the front pocket of their bag. "Hold his mouth open."

So Hannibal does, grasping the man's dislocated jaw in one hand and holding down his forehead with the other. From the opposite side of the man's body, Will dabs at the tooth's opened root. The man's moaning whimpers pitch into keening cries as Will presses the towel into the gap and pulls it away, blood cleared enough to reveal the exposed nerve. They both watch it, enraptured, the nerve pink and throbbing until the blood wells up like water from a spring and hides it again.

"Oh," Will whispers.

'Oh', indeed, Hannibal thinks, and the man beneath them sobs.

(“They took her teeth," Hannibal speaks into the darkness one night.

Will rolls over to look at him. So, not asleep then. Neither of them is, despite the late hour.

"I found them later, in the refuse pile," Hannibal continues.

Outside, the world is moving in a flurry despite the heavy darkness-- a snowstorm so thick they only catch occasional glimpses of the pine branches whipping beyond their window-- but inside Will is preternaturally still. Hannibal watches the window, knowing Will is watching him, until he feels warm arms enclose him.

Held tightly, Hannibal closes his eyes.

"They can't have yours," Will vows. "They're mine.")

The cuff links gleam in the light of the chandelier. Hannibal would bury them in his skin if he could; the polished teeth would flash and glint in the light every time he turned his wrist, just as they do tonight while they settle into their seats. The little wooden box had been waiting for him on the vanity when Hannibal had stepped out of the shower. Such a thoughtful gift from Will. He had known immediately that whatever he found inside the box would be of great significance solely because Will had left it for him to find. Hannibal could play along with that— said nothing about them as he entered the living room but, instead, adjusted the arms of his suit jacket conspicuously.

Will's chest had shuddered with a heavy exhale. He rubbed a hand over his mouth and cleared his throat. "You look good," he said finally, voice tight.

Hannibal had preened.

It is Will's mark on him, though everyone else is too ignorant to see it. "Look," Hannibal wants to declare, pulling up the sleeves of his suit jacket to show off the cuff links Will made for him, hand polished and painstakingly filed to rest snugly in the golden jewelry, "look how much I am to him. Look at what lovely he does for me."

"Maybe I'll make you a pendant next," Will had whispered to him in a shadowed corner of the grand staircase up to the symphony theater. He traced his fingers down Hannibal's neck, pressed aside his collar and bow tie to run the path where the chain would rest. Hannibal closed his eyes to see it— thin, delicate gold to match the cuff links, the pendant resting at the hollow of his throat where Will's fingers sit thick and warm against his skin. He would wear it with nothing else, covered only by the teeth Will has graced him with— teeth that Will has transformed into things of pure decadence and beauty for Hannibal. The chatty true crime podcaster, the discourteous university student, the condescending art dealer-- whose teeth would next have the honor of being elevated under Will's hands?

"Nothing would please me more," Hannibal said, the words falling so desperately short of his true meaning.

His beautiful creature wants to see him bejeweled and adorned and Hannibal wants nothing more than for everyone to see it. But for now he will settle for this, for Will's hand slipping around his once the curtains have fallen, fingers curled loosely around the top, tracing the patterns of his veins, the heel of his palm pressed to the tooth set into the cuff link, imprinting the cool gold into Hannibal's skin until it warms between them and thrums with heat.

("What do you think they'll call us?" Will asks him one evening, head on Hannibal's chest. He is sleepy and languid, looking up at Hannibal with a distant, dreamy gaze.

"You'll have to elaborate, dear. We've been called plenty of things by plenty of people," Hannibal replies, amused.

"They're catching on, you know," Will elaborates. "And the Tooth Fairy has already been claimed."

Hannibal hums in agreement, stroking Will's hair. "It's a bit too on the nose for Freddie's tastes—" Will snorts a laugh "— she practices a different kind of heavy-handedness."

"Maybe a different play on words then— something about vampires," Will muses and nuzzles into the crook of Hannibal's neck.

"Vampires are renowned less for their sharp teeth and more for what they do for them. Most monsters are, after all," Hannibal replies. "I think you'd have to start drinking blood if you wanted to earn that moniker."

Will smirks— Hannibal can feel it pressed against his pulse-point— and nibbles at the soft skin there.

"Don't give me any ideas," Will teases, and then he bites down.)

"Promise me," Will demands suddenly, startling Hannibal out of the reverie he's fallen into as he's watched Will sanitize the fresh pliers with alcohol wipe after alcohol wipe.

A languid smile spreads across Hannibal's face.

"Promise you what, Will?"

Will looks up at him then, from where he's kneeling between Hannibal's legs. It's a long searching look, and Hannibal wants to pluck his eyes from their sockets to see what he sees. Does he see Hannibal's face soften as he gazes upon the thing he loves most in the world? Can he see that Hannibal has never felt more well-tended, more protected, more cared for than when Will wields these instruments in his hands? He must know that. Everything— *everything* — has happened to lead them to this, to allow Hannibal this feeling, the ecstasy of saints. Hannibal is overcome with a wave of emotion that threatens to spill into tears. It all makes perfect sense. They make perfect sense.

"I don't know," Will finally replies. "Just promise me." As fervent as a sidewalk preacher, as demanding as the word of God.

Hannibal wraps his hands around Will's, and steadies their shared grip around the pliers. There is nothing he wouldn't promise Will, no vow he wouldn't keep. He has never been more sure of anything in his whole life. Together they bring the tool to Hannibal's lips and he opens his mouth to let Will inside.

"I promise," Hannibal breathes, lips brushing against the plier's tips.

The pliers grip down on the edge of his molar with a sharp clack of vibration that rattles through his whole skull. A deep breath is shared between them and then, together, they pull.

End Notes

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